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Steve Nerger and Eric W. Ramsey, *Bivocational Church Planters: Uniquely Wired for Kingdom Growth*. Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2007, 87 pgs.

Contact the North American Mission Board for obtaining this resource (770-410-6000).

-- Reviewed by J. D. Payne, Director, Nehemiah Project and Assistant Professor of Church Planting and Evangelism, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

This year the North American Mission Board released a new resource addressing an important area of missions, bivocational church planting. The book is divided into three primary sections. Section one addresses the question “What is bivocational church planting?” Here the biblical perspective is delineated and a definition for understanding the bivocational church planter is provided. The section concludes with an attempt to answer the question, “Why is bivocational church planting needed today in North America?” Section two is a compilation of “real stories” about “real planters.” The authors tell the stories of fifteen church planters who are primarily serving or have served as bivocational church planters. In the final section of the book, a challenge is extended to the readers to consider the possibilities of serving as bivocational church planters. The authors address some of the limitations and strengths of bivocational church planting. They also challenge the reader with some personal questions and provide a list of some of the occupational possibilities for bivocational church planters. The section concludes

with a discussion of the future of church planting in North America, and provides a very brief bibliography.

The authors of this book establish their purpose in both the introduction and first chapter. According to them, “This book is written to suggest the primary place to look when starting churches, especially in the rural and urban contexts, is to bivocational church planters” (viii). Later, the authors add to this purpose by noting, “The intention of this book is to awaken the fires of church planting in those who are uniquely equipped for bivocational church planting by their profession and passion” (5). The authors estimate that more than one half of all church plants today are bivocational in some form (5), with bivocational church planter being defined as, “someone who starts a church and gains a part, if not all, of his personal income from an outside source other than the church” (7).

There are several strengths to this work. First, this work fills a much needed gap in church planting literature today. There is a great need for additional writings on bivocational church planting. Second, the authors remind the readers that they cannot depend solely on the seminaries to reach North America by sending out church planters. Though the authors themselves are not opposed to seminary training, they recognize the fact that reaching a continent with the gospel and multiplying churches is not possible if the primary paradigm requires individuals to be removed from their cultural contexts for three years to study at theological institutions and only then to return to the fields and serve as missionaries (9). The third strength of this work is the second section that contains real stories about church planters serving throughout the United States and

Canada. In these real stories of fifteen different men, the authors describe their works with emphasis placed upon their bivocationalism. The fourth strength of this work is that it is very easy to read. The brief eighty-seven pages make this work easy to grasp and understand by the busy person.

There are at least three limitations of this work. First, the authors' redundancy is annoying when explaining that the North American Church should not be relying upon the seminaries to train and send out church planters. At least three times in the brief eighty-seven pages, the authors remind the reader of the limitations of this particular method. Second, one of the personal stories in Section Two (page 54), is actually of a fully-funded church planter. The inclusion of this account seems to defeat the purpose of the book. The authors do not state why this individual's story was included. Finally, within Section Two, the authors include two stories of church restarts. Though there is much discussion concerning church restarts today as a viable form of church planting, it is my conviction that a restart (a word that I dislike using when referring to churches) is not typically a true church planting work. Though there are many principles that can be applied from the church planting world into the restarting of a church, I draw a distinction between that methodology and church planting methodology.

Overall, this is an excellent work that should be added to the libraries of church planters today. Steve Nerger and Eric Ramsey have done an excellent service in penning this text and challenging the Church to recognize the critical importance of bivocational

church planting. As the Lord calls out more bivocational church planters, this book will be of great value to such missionaries.